No. 40

The
REDEMPTION
of
Marie Gordon
THE TRAGIC STORY OF
WRONGED WOMANHOOD
Price 10¢

"You—you better let me stay here at the hotel," she said to her friend. "You don't want an unhappy woman on your hands. I must remain alone so I can reason this thing out."

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CAPTAIN LE MANS was again looking at the English cruiser in hot pursuit of the vessel he was in command of, and as he looked, he saw to his horror that the English cruiser was gaining on his own ship. The next shell from her exploded almost at his feet. He dropped with a terrible pain in his head, and when he revived he saw dead men sprawled all around him.

Blindly he grouped his way down to the cabin. At the door he stopped and listened. As he fumbled with the key in the lock he heard a low moan.

"Ruth—Ruth!" he called, running in.

She was lying across the bunk, half dead with fright. At sight of her lover, bleeding profusely from a deep wound in the head, she screamed.

Le Mans made a pitiful attempt to smile as she rushed into his arms.

"Brave little girl," he said tenderly. "I am afraid the worst is about to happen."

"I knew it," she answered with amazing calmness. "I knew it as soon as I heard those shots. But we must not let them take us prisoners. I am not afraid to die. Here, take this." She handed him the gun.

Captain Le Mans shook his head.

"No, my darling. I can not use that. A true sailor goes down with his ship, and you are a sailor's sweetheart. Come."

Placing his arm protectingly around her, he drew her up the stairs. The ship was lurching frightfully.

The firing had ceased and nothing could be heard except the howling of the wind and a few sharp commands in English.

Up to the bridge they walked, very slowly.

Captain Le Mans had chosen the place from which he wanted to leap with her.

For a moment they stood in each other's embrace.

"Kiss me just once," he said, his voice quivering. "Kiss me just once, and cling tight to me."

Their lips met. Then they leaped.

Even as they darted through space, a sharp cry came from the bridge of the English cruiser.

"Lower a boat instantly," came the command. "Bring those two aboard."

It was the work of a few seconds to lower a small boat. Four stout sailors jumped into it and rowed to the spot where Captain Le Mans had disappeared in the water with the woman.

"There they are," one of them cried.

Two white faces very close together had become visible. The eyes were closed.

Le Mans was unconscious but still breathing. Ruth seemed to be dying and she still clung to her lover. It was impossible to separate them and they were drawn into the boat together.

Once aboard the British cruiser every effort was made to bring them back to life.

They were lying in the same cabin on separate cots, between which stood the tall, young commander with a look of satisfaction in his eyes. He was none other than Captain Allan Bingham.

His fondest wish had come true. Captain Le Mans was in his power.

So far as his American wife was concerned he felt nothing but contempt. He felt half inclined to release her, and he would have done so but for the realization that she might be needed at the future time when his name was to be cleared of the foul stigma which rested upon it.

Allan Bingham had a good case against the Frenchman. Several English sailors had been killed by

a shell fired from the wine smuggler.

This made Captain Le Mans liable for murder because he was in command and subsequently responsible.

During the trip back to London the two prisoners were kept under close surveillance. They were being kept apart for obvious reasons.

Ruth was given the most uncomfortable hour of her life after having been brought to London. And the man who gave it to her was Captain Allan Bingham.

First of all he informed her that he had been granted an absolute divorce, which elicited a sarcastic laugh and a shrug of her shoulders.

But when he told her that Le Mans was to be shot the following morning at sunrise, she nearly collapsed.

She pleaded for her lover's life as no woman ever pleaded before. Finally she was taken to a cell in the tower and kept under close surveillance.

Captain Le Mans had also been placed in solitary confinement. His cell was dark and cheerless enough to break the spirit of the most optimistic person.

The man most elated over the entire affair, of course, was Captain Bingham.

He had redeemed the promise made to Admiral Benson. But that alone did not satisfy him.

While most of his brother officers again believed in him, there were those who still regarded him with a certain amount of suspicion.

So in order that every vestige of doubt be cleared away, he insisted that Captain Le Mans confess having entered into a conspiracy with his former wife to steal the formula for the explosive discovered by him after many months of research and patient labor.

Le Mans was brought before the highest tribunal of justice in England. Allan Bingham appeared as the prosecuting witness.

The French naval officer lost none of his courage and military bearing during the week of solitary confinement.

He appeared to be quite cheerful and he did not pay the least attention to the many hostile eyes that glared at him as he was led into the courtroom surrounded by a heavy guard.

As the trial was practically a court-martial, the highest official in the British navy at home was chosen to preside.

He was Admiral Benson.

"Captain Le Mans," he began as the Frenchman stood before him, erect and unafraid. "You are charged with being a spy."

Le Mans shook his head and grinned impudently.

"The charge is absurd," he said, his voice ringing clear.

"Then you deny it?"

"Absolutely."

Captain Bingham rose to speak, but Admiral Benson motioned to him to remain seated.

"You are accused of having conspired with a certain woman to steal a document of inestimable value to this government, the joint property of this government and Captain Bingham," the admiral went on in an even tone, "and you are further accused of having made use of this document in open violation of international law.

"The crime is all the more despicable because a woman was made a part of it by you, and because it was committed in time of peace. You could not have done anything more base. Have you anything to say in your defense?"

For almost a full minute Captain Le Mans stood like a statue in the intense silence.

Then he leaned slightly forward.

"As I said before, the charges are utterly absurd," he declared brusquely. "They are without foundation. What proof have you to support them?"

"Proof?" the judge thundered. "We know the name of the man to whom you sold the formula. But you are also a murderer, and a violator of international law. The charge of being a spy will be disposed of first. You stole that formula and you can't deny it."

Captain Le Man's lips curled into a smile that was almost diabolical.

"I demand that you bring better proof than that," he said, his eyes meeting those of the presiding officer defiantly. "You have accused me of theft. Prove it."

Admiral Benson motioned to Captain Bingham. They held a whispered conversation.

The first witness produced was an old butler at Bingham Manor for almost thirty years.

After having been duly sworn he testified that he had seen Captain Le Mans at the manor frequently in the company of the woman, then Mrs. Bingham.

He said that, after having become suspicious, he had watched them, and overheard the accused plan with the woman to get possession of the formula.

"Did you see the theft committed?" Le Mans demanded.

The question was answered in the negative.

The butler was excused and several other servants were called to the stand. Their testimony was practically the same as that of the first witness.

When asked by Le Mans if either of them had seen the theft committed, they answered no.

"You can not convict me on that kind of testimony," the Frenchman cried. "It is circumstantial and utterly unsatisfactory. And I want to voice my objection to being kept in solitary confinement like a common

criminal. I demand that I be accorded the privileges and consideration due every honorable prisoner."

A murmur of surprise and consternation went around.

"You are a thief and a murderer!" the judge declared angrily. "We are not even obliged to grant you the privilege of appearing before this tribunal. What you deserve is to be shot without a trial."

Le Mans raised himself to his full height.

"I came here prepared for anything," he said sarcastically. "But I suggest that a few more witnesses be allowed to speak. Lady Bingham, for instance, and her son, Allan Bingham.

"This suggestion I make for good reasons. I am sure the testimony of these two people would be very interesting——and especially interesting with regard to Bingham's American wife."

Another space of intense silence ensued.

Allan Bingham averted his face. It was very evident that he had no desire to speak.

After being questioned for another thirty or more minutes,it was seen that the wily Frenchman could not be trapped into making any sort of a statement detrimental to his case.

A short conference was held in an adjoining room. It lasted only a few minutes.

The men present virtually composed the jury. They recommended that Captain Le Mans be shot without further ceremony.

Bingham objected.

"Wait at least until we have heard the woman," he declared. "She might be more willing to tell the whole truth."

Admiral Benson agreed.

"Have her brought in here," he ordered. "And I

suggest that you question her, Bingham."

The latter at once gave his assent.

Le Mans was taken back to his cell, and Ruth was brought in.

Allan Bingham felt quite certain that he would be able to trick her into making a statement that would dispel all doubt and clear up the matter. Ruth would not deny the truth.

As she entered the room, she walked with the listlessness of an automaton.

She did not look to the right nor the left, but stared straight ahead with unseeing eyes. Neither did she take a seat which had been placed fer her. She remained standing.

"Please, sit down," Bingham urged.

She sank down, trembling.

At sight of her so utterly weary and helpless, the man who was to question her, weakened.

No matter what had happened, Allan Bingham had loved this woman once. A wave of emotion came over him, and he turned pale.

He said a few words to Admiral Benson, then left the room hurriedly.

The old admiral at once began the examination

"What is your name?" he asked.

"Ruth Bingham," came back in a faint voice.

"You are the divorced wife of Captain Bingham, are you not?"

She nodded.

Admiral Benson regarded her for a moment.

"You are an American by birth, are you not, Mrs. Bingham?"

Again she nodded.

"Have you any close relatives?" was the next question.

"Yes," was the response in a scarcely audible voice. "A brother."

"Does he know what sort of a woman you are?" the presiding officer went on relentlessly. "Does he by chance know that you are the mistress of ——— "

Something in her eyes made him pause.

Chapter 131

THE WAGES OF SIN

ONE of the most feared moments in Ruth's life had come. She would rather have cut out her tongue than reveal that was Philip Gordon's sister. The thought of him brought out all the good still left in her.

No matter what the outcome of this affair might be, the name of Gordon must be protected for her only brother's sake.

Dear old Phil! He had always been so kind and generous. There had never been another brother like him in all the world. At this particular moment her sad heart went out to him with longing.

She choked down a sob as she met the inquisitive glare of Admiral Benson.

"So you have a brother," the latter spoke again, and somewhat less severely.

Ruth gave a slight nod.

"Yes, I have,sir," she admitted with a wailing sound in her throat. "And I love him dearly. "But he must never know!" she went on with a little more spirit. as a sudden wave of color dyed her cheeks. "He must not be informed —— "

"You may rest easy on that score, Mrs. Bingham. We do not like to spread unpleasant news. What transpires here will go no further."

When the old admiral persisted in asking a few more questions that were of a very personal nature, hot anger flared up in Ruth.

"Why do you torture me like this?" she cried.

"Is it necessary? Why don't you have me shot? I am sure you are capable of it!"

"You are wrong," Admiral Benson reproved sternly. "We don't shoot women in England, not even such as you. You have brought disgrace upon an honored name by stealing something that was of no value to yourself, but a terrible weapon in the hands of an enemy in time of war.

"I had you brought before me to give you a chance to clear Captain Allan Bingham's name, for he was accused of having sold that formula to an agent of the French government.

"As a consequence Captain Allan Bingham was disgraced and discredited in the eyes of the law as well as in the eyes of his brother officers of the British navy. A tremendous injustice was done him because of you. Do you realize that?

"I am unwilling to believe that you, who once was his wife, should want that stigma to cling to him. You are the only person who can clear him. I am going to ask you to confess your part in the affair. To make a clean breast of it is the least you can do."

Ruth glanced at the speaker as if she had not fully understood what he said.

Finally she gave a slight nod.

"I will do —— what I can," broke from her lips in broken gasps. "But tell me —— please tell me, is it true that Captain Le Mans was shot?"

Admiral Bensan shook his head.

"No," he replied quickly. "You have been wrongly informed. Captain Le Mans was in this room but a moment ago. He is very much alive and in the best of health."

The effect these words had on the young woman was electrifying.

She sat up straight in her chair, then looked up doubtfully for a moment. Presently her eyese began to clear and shone.

Her face underwent a sudden change.

It was a wonderful transfiguration which told plainly how dearly she loved the Frenchman.And she was not ashamed of the emotion she displayed.

"Oh, thank God —— thank God!" she exclaimed, raising her folded hands.

Admiral Benson held a short whispered conversation with the officer seated next to him.

Then he faced Ruth.

"I must inform you, however," he remarked, leaning toward her, "that in all probability Captain Le Mans will be shot within twenty-four hours unless he tells us the absolute truth about the theft of the formula. We have questioned him, and he positively refuses to speak. That was a serious mistake on his part."

During the space of silence which followed, the admiral watched Ruth closely to see the effect of his words.

She had turned white. Even her usually red lips had lost their color.

"If Captain Le Mans persists in maintaining this stubborn silence," Admiral Benson spoke again, "he will have to take the consequences. He will be shot. There is only one person who might save him.

"And you are that person, Mrs. Bingham. You can save him if you have a mind to. If you will make a full confession about the theft of the formula, your lover shall go free."

Ruth sprang up, her lips quivering with the fire of sudden eagerness.

"Oh, I will do anything to save him —— anything you may suggest!" she cried, her eyes taking on a fev-

erish light.

A murmur of satisfaction was heard about the room. Admiral Benson speedily suppressed it with words of stern rebuke.

"Of course, you must tell the whole truth, Mrs. Bingham," he said, facing Ruth. "Nothing but the absolute truth will help Le Mans."

"I will tell you the truth," she exclaimed. "I am the one who stole the formula. I stole it from my former husband in a spirit of resentfulness and revenge. Yes, I did it —— I did it!"

And while the British officials sat there listening with rapt attention, Ruth told the story and all the details which led up to the theft.

Without thinking she betrayed the fact that Captain Le Mans had first suggested the idea of stealing the formula to her.

She little dreamed that by doing this she had sealed her lover's doom.

After she had finished, Admiral Benson gave her a long talk. He pointed out to her the terrible mistake she had made, and chided her gently for eloping with Captain Le Mans.

"I still believe that you are inherently a good woman, my dear Mrs. Bingham," he ended. "My advice to you is that you return to your home in America and forget the unpleasant past.

"You have so many things in your favor. You are young and well educated. You were blessed with extraordinary beauty. I would like to have you leave us with the right impression of England and our naval officers. Of course, we all make mistakes, but we try to be gentlemen.

"And, please understand that I hold no brief against you. My heart goes out to you in sympathy. I

want you to believe this. I shall see to it that you are released at once."

Ruth was overjoyed.

The old admiral's words had impressed her very deeply. But so far as Captain Le Mans was concerned, her heart had not changed.

She still loved him.

Yes, she would love him until she drew her last breath. Her voice was pitifully small as she tried to utter a few words of appreciation.

Admiral Benson smiled benignly as he listened to her. Then he rang the bell and gave Ruth in charge of a kindly matron.

Instead of being returned to the cell, Ruth was given more comfortable and more cheerful quarters. Words of encouragement were spoken to her. Good advice was given without asking.

Once more alone, Ruth began to reflect.

She thought it rather strange that nothing definite had been said about Captain Le Mans' release. Why had nothing been said?

The question she did not try to answer.

But hope having once taken full possession of her heart, she forced all doubt out of it. She looked toward the future with the most pleasant anticipations. She would be reunited with Captain Le Mans. There could be no doubt of that.

Ah, how she loved him. To be free and with him was life. It was eveerything.

That night she slept very well.

Ruth awoke with somewhat of a start just when the gray dawn was creeping over the housetops. She experienced a vague feeling of uneasiness.

Ruth stared at the ceiling for a while, then rose and began to dress. She found herself suddenly hum-

ming a tune.

Sitting on the edge of the bed, she watched the sun rise higher and higher.

Suddenly she heard something that sounded very much like a sharp command. With a quick move she rose and glanced through the heavily barred window into the courtyard below.

Ruth looked once —— then again, and became rooted to the spot.

The horror of what she saw deprived her of her power of speech.

A tall man with broad shoulders and a wavy crop of dark hair had just been marched into the center of the coutyard where he stood surrounded by a detachement of British soldiers.

And he stood very erect as the officer in charge read something to him from a sheet of paper.

Then he was placed against the wall, facing the window at which Ruth stood ——staring —— staring. She could not drag her eyes away.

She wanted to scream,but her tongue cleft to the roof of her mouth.

There was no fear in the man's eyes. His lips were curled into a half disdainful, half defiant smile. He looked magnificent, facing death.

A quick maneuver brought the soldiers into a very straight line.

Then came a low command, and the rifles were raised.

One short word came sharply.

"Fire!"

As the volley rang out, the man against the wall pitched forward on his face, quivered a little, then lay quite still.

"Oh, my God!" Ruth had found her voice.

But Captain Le Mans did not hear her heartrending cry. He had gone to the Great Beyond, and he died a brave man.

For a moment Ruth stood paralized and strove vainly against the recurring horror of the thing. Her hands crept upward and she closed her ears as though she wanted to shut out the horrible sound that was still dinning in her brain.

Then, with a pitiful wail, she began to sway back and forth, like a reed broken by the wind, and fell in a heap.

When Ruth regained consciousness she found herself lying in a snowy white bed, at the foot of which sat a neatly dressed nurse.

With the first thought came the realization of what had happened. She turned her face to the wall and wept bitterly. The man she had loved as perhaps no other man was ever loved before, was no longer among the living.

The nurse rose and sought to quiet the unhappy young woman.

But it was of no avail!

No one on earth could comfort Ruth now, for they had killed the man she loved. And he had been put to death in spite of the fact that she had been given the assurance that his life would be spared.

They had tricked her in telling the truth about the theft of the formula. Benson had made her a promise which he failed to keep.

For a long time her heartbreaking sobs continued. At last she grew calm —— strangely calm.

When the nurse spoke to Ruth again, the latter appeared to be quite rational. Every question put to her she answered clearly and distinct.

"I have been instructed to take care of you until

you are able to travel," the nurse told her. "I suppose you are going back to America. I would if I were you. It is really the best thing to do. Your traveling expenses will be paid by the English government."

Ruth shook her head, and her eyes became very hard.

"Let the English government keep the money," she said in a metallic voice.

"But I have a check here already for you to cash," the nurse protested.

"Then you keep it," Ruth suggested with a very strange smile.

A few minutes later, Ruth rose and began to dress like an automaton. The look in her eyes was that of a woman who is contemplating a desperate act. She did not even know that the nurse was assisting her.

Once, on her way to the door, and ready to leave, she turned her ghastly features to the silent figure at her elbow.

"Goodby!" she whispered.

"Goodby, and God be with you!" was the pious retort from the nurse.

Ruth did not hear it. Nor did she notice the curious glances that followed her as she walked down the street.

Although she did not know in which direction the river Thames was, instinct seemed to be guiding her. She desired only one thing, and that was death.

Those who saw her jump into the river never had a chance to save her, for the swift, strong current instantly carried her down the stream.

It was indeed a pitiful ending of a young life that had once been so full of promise. But somewhere it is written that:

"The Wages of Sin is Death!"

In Ruth's case the end was all the more pathetic and deplorable because of family connections which were of the best. The Gordons of Chicago were always a proud race and of a long lineage of old American ancestry.

Poor Ruth was even denied the privilege of a decent burial. Her body floated down the Thames river toward the North sea.

For a short while it remained visible as it bobbed up and down. Then suddenly it disappeared below the surface of the water, and was never seen again.

Chapter 132

BITTER HEARTACHES

IT WAS one of Victor Talbot's farm hands who discovered Philip Gordon's unconscious form lying by the roadside at a very early morning hour. After a quick examination he discovered that the wounded man was still breathing.

Help was quickly summoned. The physician who arrived upon the scene some minutes later was the first to recognize the victim of the bullet.

He shook his head, deeply perplexed.

"I don't know who should want to shoot this man. I really don't," he said half to himself. "So far as I know he did not have an enemy in the world."

"Do you know him?" a voice at his elbow asked quickly.

The doctor nodded.

"Yes," he declared. "He is Mr. Philip Gordon. I have known him for a long while. He is one of the best and finest men in this part of the country. The fiend who tried to killl him ,almost succeeded."

"Then you don't think he is going to die, do you?" the inquisitive one spoke again.

"Not unless unforeseen complications set in," was the answer. "But he must be removed at once. I suppose one of the farmers living in this immediate vicinity would shelter him until he is out of danger.. At lleeast I hope so."

"Why not take him home?" someone suggested. "It would be best."

The doctor shook his head.

"No," he objected. "It is too far. Mr. Gordon, I am afraid, would never stand the long trip. He has lost too much blood."

At this juncture the farmhand who had discovered the wounded man first, spoke up.

"I believe Mr. Talbot would gladly consent to having Mr. Gordon brought to his home," he declared. "They are friends."

The discussion ended right there.

Under the supervision of the physician, the badly wounded man was gently placed in an automobile and taken to the Talbot estate.

Victor Talbot happened to be standing at one of the windows. For quite a long while he remained absolutely motionless when he saw the commotion in front of his house.

Several men were lifting someone from an automobile. Then, at last, he ran out.

"What has happened, Dr. Brown?" he inquired. Then his gaze fell upon the wouded man. "Good God, that is Phillip Gordon!" he exclaimed excitedly. "What happeneed to him? Is he hurt?"

"Somebody shot him," several voices replied in unison.

Victor Talbot turned white.

But this was not the time to waste words. He took a hand at once and assisted in carrying his friend into the house.

Dr Brown at once began probing for the bullet. It was a very delicate and dangerous operation to remove it, but he succeeded.

"That was a close shave," he said to Victor Talbot, who stood watching him anxiously. "If that bullet had gone a little more to the left, Mr. Gordon would have been a dead man. But I think he'll pull through

now. The wound is not a dangerous one. What he'll need is careful nursing."

"He'll get that," replied Talbot.

While the physician wrote a prescription, Talbot sent for one of his men and told him to hurry to the village drugstore to have it filled.

And then began a two hour anxious watching and waiting at the bedside.

During this period of time, Dr. Brown and Victor Talbot talked in low whispers. Neither of them had the least suspicion as to who might have wanted to kill Philip Gordon.

The latter finally opened his eyes and a moan escaped his dry lips.

"Give me a drink of —— of water, please," he begged in a weak voice.

Talbot was up in a second.

He had already reached for the glass of water standing on the table, But the physician restrained him with a firm hand.

"No water," he warned. "A teaspoonful of medicine first."

Very tenderly Victor Talbot played the nurse. As he raised his friend's head, their eyes met in a glance of sympathetic understanding.

Then the physician gave the wounded man an injection, and shortly afterward the latter fell into a sound sleep.

Dr. Brown turned to Talbot.

"I'll leave him to you now," he said as he prepared to go. "Let the patient sleep as long as he wants to. It is the best thing for him. I shall call again some time this afternoon."

Ater the doctor had gone, the housekeeper came up and wanted to know if she could do anything. She

appeared anxious to help.

"I'll nurse Mr. Gordon if you want me to," she offered.

Talbot shook his head.

"Thanks, Mrs. Ruggles," he answered with a most grateful smile. "I will take care of him."

Silently the good woman went back downstairs. She was shaking her head and mumbling some words to herself.

As might have been expected, the news of the shooting soon became the sole topic of conversation in the entire neighborhood. Farmers hailed one another on the road, and thus the story spread.

Meanwhile Victor Talbot remained with the wounded man. Not for a moment during all that first day did he move from the bedside. Somewhere about noon, Gordon awoke.

"Phil, old man, how are you?" the host cried with much feeling.

'Not so good," the other answered with a moan. "I have considerable pain."

"Of course you have," agreed Talbot. "What else can you expect? You are a mighty lucky man to be alive. How did this thing happen?"

"You mean who shot me, Victor?"

"Yes."

Gordon shook his head.

"I can't tell you," he said.

"Why can't you?"

"Because I want to keep the facts out of the newspapers," Phil replied. "You know what those papers can do. Besides, this is a private matter, and ——"

"Now look here," Talbot interrupted," you must not let the matter rest as it is. The man who tried to kill you must be apprehended and brought to justice.

You owe it to yourself."

Gordon forced a smille.

"How do you know a man done it?"

"Women, as a rule, don't carry automatics of such heavy caliber," came back quickly. "Look at the bullet the doctor removed from your wound."

For quite a while the man on the bed allowed his gaze to rest on the speaker.

He knew well enough that some sort of an explanation had to be made, not only to his friend here, but to the folk at home as well.

No doubt his father- in- law as well as the chidren would begin to worry about his prolonged absence.How could he explain?

But the truth must never become known. Philip Gordon was absolutely determined about that.. Never should the world know that the wound in his side had been inflicted by his wife's lover during a fight.

However, an explanation that was plausible, had to be manufactured by the imagination. It had to be a well conceived fib that would be believed. And to put this over, Gordon needed a loyal friend.

Fortunately Victor Talbot was such a friend.

He was a man who would never violate another's confidence.

"Victor," Gordon said in a pleading tone, "You must help me out of this. And in order that you get this thing straight, I will have to make a clean breast of it all. I —— I think I can trust you."

"It was not necessary to say that, old man," was Talbot's mild reproach. "I have never violated a confidence a friend gave."

With an impulsive motion Philip Gordon held his hand out.

"Forgive me," he pleaded. "Don't get the idea

that I doubt you, for a moment. But what I am about to tell you, involves not only the man who shot me, but also my —— my wife."

"Your wife?"

"Yes, my wife!"

Victor Talbot gave a little gasp.

"Tell me, old man," he said.

And then Gordon, in a voice that often quivered with suppressed emotion, told the entire nasty story. He told about Alice's clandestine meetings with her lover, Harold Wayne, and what followed.

"The affair must be hushed up," he ended. "Wayne was not nearly as much ta blame as my wife. She lured him on."

"I see," said Talbot, pressing his unhappy friend's hand sympathetically. "I understand fully. Now what do you want me to do?"

Gordon remained silent a moment.

"I want you," he began finally, "to spread the story that I shot myself accidentally with my own gun. You might say that the weapon dropped from my pocket and went off. Such things happen.

"Drive over to Oak Manor and inform my father-in-law, Mr. Procter. But you must be on your guard. Don't let him trip you up. He is a shrewd old gentleman. He knows something about the affair between Wayne and my wife."

"Leave it to me," came back quickly. "I'll put this over to your entire satisfaction. And don't you worry for a moment."

Gordon's eyes expressed the deep gratitude he felt.

Again he held out his hand which the other gripped for a long moment. It put a new seal upon their sincere friendship which had begun when they were

pals at college.

"I am going down now and have the housekeeper bring you some broth," Talbot declared as he moved in the direction of the door. "You must keep very quiet and leave everything to me."

With these words Victor left the room.

Within fifteen minutes he was on his way to Oak Manor in a fast car. Upon arriving there he at once asked to see Mr. Procter.

A presentiment of misfortune came to the latter at sight of Talbot. The very expression with which he received the unexpected visitor showed the great anxiety in his mind.

Talbot succeeded in stating the case in such a manner that it did not occur to the old gentleman to doubt his story.

He bore up bravely and was very much relieved by the visitor's assurance that Philip Gordon's life was not in danger.

Mr. Procter insisted, however, upon accompanying Talbot back to the latter's estate, as soon as he had attended to a few matters.

The first thing the old gentleman did, was to send a telegram to Alice, informing her of the accident. Then he sought Marie Desmond, and informed her of what had happened.

The shock was almost too great for her. She grew deathly pale and began to tremble so violently that Mr. Procter assisted her to a chair.

"Merciful God!" she murmured, closing her hot eyes. "Spare his life!"

Mr. Procter watched her curiously.

When she had recovered her self-command, she begged him to take her with him.

"I want to take care of him," she nearly sobbed.

"But how about the children, Miss Desmond?" he asked. "Could you leave them?"

"Annie will watch over them," she told him

When Mr. Procter seemed still disinclined to grant Marie's request, she began to beg. There was something so compelling in her language that he could no longer refuse her.

However, before Mr. Procter definitely made up his mind, he consulted with Victor Talbot. The latter at once said that it would be a fine thing for Miss Desmond to come along and nurse Gordon.

Marie said a hurried goodby to the children, gave Annie some instructions, and then accompanied the two men to the waiting automobile.

She spoke little on the way to the Talbot estate. But she listened anxiously to Talbot as he gave more particulars of the accident to Mr. Procter.

Victor Talbot told the manufactured story very nicely. He admitted that Phil must have been unusually careless with his gun.

"I never knew that he carried a gun," Mr. Procter said somewhat skeptically. "So far as I can see, he never had any use for one."

"Well," Talbot declared stoutly, "He surely had a gun with him last night."

As Marie listened to the discussion of the two men, she chose to form her own conclusions. She did not believe the story of the accident.

But her suspicion on that score were soon replaced by a feeling of grave apprehension for the man she loved so dearly. She wondered how badly he was really hurt. And she wondered if he would allow her to nurse him.

Then her mind became occupied with other, and no less anxious thoughts. She knew that Mr. Procter

had sent a telegram to Alice.

What would be the result? Would Phil's second wife rush to his bedside? A feeling of jealonsy took possession of Marie's heart. No matter what place Alice held in the Gordon household, she had no moral right to claim Phil.

Marie's train of thoughts was interrupted when the automobile drew up in front of the Talbot home. Victor helped her and Mr. Procter alight, then guided them to the room in which the wounded man lay.

Phil appeared to be asleep. When Marie saw the ghastly white face, she could not restrain her tears. She made aquick sign to the two men to remain quiet. Then the three stole from the room as silently as they had come.

In the living room downstairs they held a conference. Mr. Procter insisted that Dr. Van Buren should take charge of the case at once.

There were no objection to this.

Dr. Van Buren was telephoned for, and he came immediately. Dr. Brown arrived about the same time, and the two physicians held a consultation. Dr. Van Buren thought it best to examine the wounded man thoroughly before he gave his opinion of Gordon's condition.

The two doctors proceeded to the sickroom. Phil had awakened, but he seemed to be in a stupor. He gave no sign of recognition as Dr. Van Buren began to examine him.

Although Marie had not been invited to watch the examination, she was present just the same. Nothing could have kept her out of the sickroom.

Not for a moment did her eyes leave the doctor's face. From the expression of Dr. Van Buren's face she sought to discover his opinion of Phil's condition.

The physician's face remained very grave during the entire examination. When he finished, Marie pressed her hand involuntarily to her heart which was throbbing wildly.

"He must be kept quiet," Dr. Van Buren whispered, "just as quiet as possible. There is no immediate danger, but the slightest negligence may cost him his life. Of course, he will have to remain here. Under no circumstances must he bemoved."

"May I stay here to nurse him, doctor?" begged Marie. "I want to take care of him."

The physician gave her quick glance.

"Do you want to, Miss Desmond?"

She nodded and forced back the tears.

"Of course, you may nurse him," he declared as he patted her arm. "I was just about to suggest that very thing . I suppose you can be spared at Oak Manor. The children —— "

"They are being taken care of by Annie," Marie broke in eageerly.

Dr. Van Buren nodded, and that ended the discussion.

Old Mr. Procter sat with Victor Talbot downstairs. He begged to be allowed to see his son-in-law. Presently Marie came to get him.

Phil had been given an opiate, and he was just about to drop off to sleep when the old gentleman entered. His eyelids lifted drowsily, and the faintest flicker of a smile illuminated his pale face.

The old gentleman seemed on the verge of breaking down utterly. Big Tears rolled down his wrinkled face. His lips began to quiver, and he laid a trembling hand on Phil's feverish brow.

"My boy —— my boy!" he sobbed, then turned hastily away.

Marie took him gently by the hand and led him downstairs. They tried to assure him that Gordon, the wounded man was in no danger, but he would not believe it.

As the hours passed his gaze wandered in the direction of the door frequently.

"Why don't she come?" he said half aloud "I sent her a telegram."

Marie knew of whom the old gentleman was thinking, and her heart contracted.

Fifteen minutes later a messenger boy arrived with a telegram. It had been sent by Grace Marshall.

"Alice is not here," it read.

Dumbfounded, Mr. Procter stared at the yellow paper. What did this mea? Alice had said in her last message to him that she was going to visit Grace Marshall. Why had she not done so?

Mutely he handed the telegram to Marie.

Upon reading it, the latter found it hard to conceal her disquietude. Her surmise that there had been a break between Phil and Alice the day before, in consequence of which Alice had left, assumed the strength of fact.

She could see that Mr. Procter had been deceived by his daughter as to her destination. She felt sorry for him.

"You must not worry too much about that," she told him gently. "Perhaps your daughter did not go to Grace Marshall direct. As soon as she receives the news of Phil's accident, she will surely come at once."

In her soul, however, Marie dreaded the moment when that woman would reach the side of her husband. Her intuition told her that they could not remain together in the Talbot home.

Alice would never tolerate her as Phil's nurse.

A quarrel would surely result no matter how hard she would try to avoid it.

On the other hand Marie could not bear the thought of being away from the man she loved No other person could give Phil the tender care she would give him. And so she waited for further developments.

Once again at Phil's bedside, she did not leave. He belonged to her. And she belonged to him.

When night came and Phil tossed feverishly about, Marie placed her cool, gentle hand on his hot brow. This seemed to quit him.

Although he was unconscious, he seemed to feel instinctively if she left his side only for a moment., and he immediately grew restless.

Time and again his lips uttered the name of his wife. But more frequently he spoke Marie's name. At last he seemed to forget Alice and he called for Miss Desmond in the most tender accents.

All night long Marie remained alone with the wounded man. Victor Talbot looked in several times, and asked if he could be of any service.

Each time Marie answered in the negative and told him to go back to bed.

In spite of Marie's great anxiety for Phil, these long night hours were a source of the most wonderful happiness to her.

She was alone with the man she loved, and there was no one to observe that she bent low over him, tenderly stroking his hair or his hot brow, or when she put her lips to his in a kiss.

Then she would sit close to him, her hands in her lap and regard him with soul-feasting eyes as though ,she could never see enough of him.

Gordon must have been slightly delirious. And it seemed that he also was conscious of being alone with

Marie, for he began to speak of the secret longing in his heart.

All the emotions he had hidden for so long, he revealed unconsciously during the night. All his sweet, tender words were intended for the one woman he had really loved —— and still loved, his first wife, the only and incomparable Marie.

He lived over again in his fevered mind all the gloriously happy hours he had spent with his first wife. Ah how vivid they were!

Once, in a tone that cut the quiet listener to the very soul, he cried out:

"Marie, come back to me. I know how terribly I have wronged you. On my bended knees I will ask you to forgive me."

And the woman sitting there like a statue hewn out of white marble, sobbed!

Never had a woman's heart been torn with fiercer and more conflicting emotions. What mental agonies she endured could not be put in words.

Ah, if she only could take this suffering man in her arms and say to him:

"Here I am, Phil. Here I am. Take me and love me. I am yours and yours alone. I have never belonged to another man.. You need not ask me to forgive you, for I have done that long ago."

But she dare not!

Existing conditions forced her to remain silent. She must remain a stranger to this man —— this man, who in the sight of God was still her husband. She must continue to play the governess to her own children.

Yes, fate had decreed that she must remain a stranger to Philip Gordon, for if she but opened her lips, the world would ring with the shame sure to come to him.

Continued in next number

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